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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 FREETOWN 000013

SENSITIVE
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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [SL](#)
SUBJECT: DECEMBER POLITICAL ROUND-UP - FREETOWN

REF: A. 08 FREETOWN 571
[1](#)B. 08 FREETOWN 598
[1](#)C. 08 FREETOWN 602
[1](#)D. 08 FREETOWN 604
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Classified By: Ambassador June Carter Perry for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

[1](#)1. (U) Summary: December was a quiet month in Sierra Leone, with most government and private offices closing for extended holidays. This month President Koroma hosted the 66th Mano River Union Summit, including a Heads of State Conference. This took place less than two weeks before the death of Lansana Conte and resulting Guinean coup, which created anxiety in Sierra Leone that the region may descend into chaos. High-profile visits from the Guinean coup leaders and Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi generated excitement and controversy as Sierra Leone celebrated the start of 2009, but Sierra Leone's bilateral relationships with both countries continue to be hazy. The 18 suspects arrested following the July cocaine bust were finally charged under the 2008 National Drug Control Act. The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) extended its deadline to submit "Declaration of Assets Forms" by two months as many people were unable to meet the original deadline of November 30. After criticism over the effectiveness of the "The Attitudinal and Behavioral Change" campaign, the brain-child of President Koroma, personnel were hired to focus on it exclusively. Japan and the EU both pledged significant amounts to support development, infrastructure, and environmental protection efforts in the country. End Summary.

GUINEAN PRESIDENT DIES

[1](#)2. (SBU) Sierra Leone reacted anxiously when Guinean President Lansana Conte's death was announced. Many people continue to be concerned that the junta regime will not hold, and a violent scramble for political power in the country will ensue. As a country still suffering the effects of its own lengthy civil war, people stated fear that Guinean unrest will necessarily spill-over into Sierra Leone. The government called a press conference after an emergency Cabinet Meeting on December 23 to allay concerns. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Information, as well as the Chief of the Sierra Leone Police, assured citizens that the security forces are on high-alert and plans are in place if a refugee crisis occurs. Comment: Further information on host government reaction to the coup can be found in reftels B, C, E, F, and G. End Comment.

QADHAFI VISITS

¶3. (C) Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi arrived in Freetown on December 31, bringing pomp and circumstance, a 500-person entourage, and seemingly little else. Comment: Reftels D, E, and H covered this visit in detail. End Comment.

PRESIDENT KOROMA HOSTS MRU SUMMIT

¶4. (U) On December 9-10, President Koroma hosted the 66th Mano River Union summit in Freetown. Koroma welcomed his counterparts from Liberia and Ivory Coast, along with the Guinean Prime Minister. Issues reportedly discussed include drug trafficking, agriculture, and security. Comment: Reftel A discussed the problems encountered in planning the Summit. Given interlocutors' immediate departure following the summit for a UN meeting and the ECOWAS summit in Abuja, and were then consumed issues relating to the Guinean coup, little information on the event and its outcomes have been shared thus far. End Comment.

COCAINE SUSPECTS CHARGED UNDER NEW LAW

¶5. (C) The 18 suspects held for allegedly importing cocaine into the country since July were charged under the new National Drug Control Act of 2008. The defense counsels argued against the charges, stating that the new law was passed after the alleged crimes were committed, and that the Constitution disallows retroactive legislation. The High

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Court Justice determined that the charges are acceptable according to legal precedent, because the offenses are contained in the previous narcotics control act (2001). Since they are not deemed "new" by legal standards, the constitutionality of the law is moot. The trial began on January 7, 2009. Comment: This ruling is a significant set-back for the Defense, though sources say that they were not surprised, and even in agreement, with the decision. The ruling can be appealed at the conclusion of the trial, and current focus for both the Prosecution and Defense is the trial phase, which could last upwards of eight weeks. Post maintains regular contact with DEA officials on the status of the case. End Comment.

ACC EXTENDS DEADLINE

¶6. (C) In the first week of December, the ACC extended its deadline for the submission of the "Assets Declaration Forms" from the November 30 2008 to January 30 2009, due to repeated pleas for more time from members of the public service. According to the ACC Act, all public officials are obligated to declare their assets, income and liabilities and to submit the completed forms to the commission within the stipulated time (Note: President Koroma was the first to comply with this regulation. End Note.). ACC sources told Emboffs that they face uphill battles with this new process, since many civil servants didn't understand how to complete the forms despite outreach and training. Comment: A source told Poloff that the forms received so far will provide excellent fodder for new investigations. The ACC have already found forms declaring assets which do not reflect individuals' known standards of living. Several whistle-blowing cases have also occurred, with servants tasked to deliver the forms to the ACC informing on their corrupt bosses. While this appears promising, the ACC has yet to file charges or prosecute under the new Act passed in September. End Comment.

ATTITUDINAL CHANGE CAMPAIGN KICKS OFF

¶17. (SBU) On December 9, President Koroma appointed a Director, National Coordinator, and Spokesman for his Attitudinal and Behavioral Change Campaign. The campaign, urging all Sierra Leoneans to be patriotic and law-abiding, is a priority of the President, but he initially appointed no personnel to steer the message, placing the burden on already over-taxed State House employees. Government critics have called the campaign a "white elephant," and these appointments are hoped to put to rest further criticism. Comment: Though Koroma's desire to instill a sense of patriotic duty and pride in Sierra Leone's citizens is not without merit, he prioritizes this issue above other, festering problems. For example, the Trafficking in Persons Secretariat was mandated by the 2005 anti-human trafficking law, but has yet to be funded despite the perception that the problem is growing. End Comment.

BILATERAL RELATIONS

¶18. (U) The Head of the EU Delegation in Sierra Leone, Hans Allden, informed journalists that the EU has budgeted 242 million Euros for Sierra Leone to support various development purposes for the next five years. Allden also said that the amount will be increased to 300 million Euros if the initial funds are properly utilized. The EU has already committed funds for the Freetown-Conakry Highway project, while 40 million Euros have been budgeted for food security for the next 5 years, 60 million for agriculture, cash crop production, processing and marketing, and 4.7 million Euros for rural electrification.

¶19. (U) Sierra Leone is among 21 African countries which will benefit from a \$92.1 million climate-change program backed by the Japanese government. Through this program, the UNDP will work with African countries to help them develop their capacity to plan, implement and monitor long term development policies designed to weather the uncertainties of climate change. The program will also help participating governments to better tap into the additional finance they may need to meet the cost of adapting to climate change.
FEDZER